

Note Sheet No. 9

November 15 - 1943

CAP. CARROLL - C.H.S. - AT THE CALLIOPE

Introduction by Don Smith, CHS

From Notes on Carroll's Life Story gathered by
Del. Brewer - CHS

It has been a bright, warm Sunday afternoon on the Ringling Bros., & Barnum & Bailey Circus lot in Detroit, and the huge tent had been packed with thousands of persons, to see the performance, preceded by a new Spectacle billed as "Hold Your Horses" -- a return to the gilded, glittering street parades of the Gay 90's. But now the sun was disappearing over the Big Top and the air grew a bit chilly; the huge crowds had left, even as the midway filled again for the night show. Most of the performers were at the dining tent, or the coaches nearby, for a short rest between shows and the backyard was practically deserted.

Deserted, that is, except for a half dozen members of CHS and Cap. Carroll, veteran player of the steam calliope in this country and abroad, who had that afternoon been presented with an Honorary Membership in the Circus Historical Society.

Our little group stood about the "Two Jesters" calliope, as Cap. deftly wielded a silver paint brush over the carvings and pipes. "Got to get her ready for Chicago, you know." he said, with what seemed to us a sort of loving pat on the near Jester's knee. "This is my farewell tour and I want to make a shining exit", he went on. (He has been saying that for years !)

"Hey, you in the overalls! Are you with this show?" cut in Old Bill, the backyard cop. "Been with it 45 years, my boy", was Cap's quick answer to his chief tormenter over the years. And then suddenly, he sat down on his ladder and seemed to gaze right through the big top, to the front door, and beyond, to the Big Show's office wagon. "You fellows have heard stories of "Rags to Riches", he said calmly, "but here is an example of Riches to Rags!". I used to be assistant treasurer of this greatest show on earth, and now I fire the calliope for them." Cap was not bitter. He was just thinking back over the years-- mostly the years which had been brighter for him, and for all of us, during the early part of the Century. He had retired a score of years ago but lost quite heavily in the market crash of 1929.

His father had wanted him to become a mechanical engineer, and offered to send him to College for that purpose, but at that time he was singing in St. Paul's Church in Washington, and being a better than average pianist, decided on a musical career. Later, he bought a banjo, which he learned to play well enough to obtain a job with a Medicine Show out of New York. Turning South, the show got as far as New Orleans, where they folded, and Cap. jumped to a Minstrel Show which folded shortly after, in Shreveport, La., Cap. returned to New Orleans and worked for a time in one of the well known Cafes, where his music was very popular with the customers. With the coming of Spring, he joined the Miles Orton Boat Show, and stayed until they reached St. Paul, Minn., when he wired his sister for money to come to New York. The next Spring found him with Forepaugh & Sells Bros., Circus --- a momentous year in Cap's life, for he married a featured wire walker, and they travelled to Australia, where they remained for a season, returning to this country to play the Orpheum Circuit, which brought them to New York. Then followed quickly, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, England, and a return to the United States, to join the Barnum & Bailey Circus with whom he has been ever since.

Cap. Carroll would never admit it, but old timers with the show like to tell of the time he stopped an elephant stampede single-handed. It was on a Fourth of July and the huge pachyderms started running when a thoughtless person tossed fire-crackers at their feet. Leaving the menagerie top, the bulls raced through the midway, upsetting refreshment stands and a wardrobe wagon, and headed blindly for the Steam

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Calliope which stood nearby. Cap was standing near his wagon and suddenly realized that he was in the direct path of the herd. Seizing a tent stake, he jumped on a ticket box and as the first elephant came within reach, Cap swung his stake at the lumbering beast. Surprised and dazed by the blow, the elephant stopped in its tracks; then slowly retreated, followed by all the rest, and Cap and his beloved Calliope were saved from destruction.

And that, fellow Historians, is Charles Carroll Mathewson, a man we are proud to call our friend. Cap is 76 years young on October 24th last -- the day this piece is written. Many happy returns of the day, Cap (even though they are a little late) and may you continue to make "Farewell Tours" from now on!

Editor's Note: The photograph of the Two Jesters Calliope, and the group around same - including Cap. Carroll -- that was sent out with the October issue of The Bandwagon - really belonged to the above article. As mentioned before, that negative was supplied by Don Smith and with the above article will make a fine addition to your historical library of well known Circus personages.

Special Notice

The "Billboard" advises Don Smith, that effective immediately, there will be no more extra copies for newsstand sale, and that size of each issue must be reduced, thereby cutting out all Departments not deemed absolutely necessary. They request that regular readers write at once and tell them which Departments they prefer to be continued, and I believe that our members will wish to write in favor of the Circus pages at least. Also subscriptions should be renewed well in advance, to insure that all copies are received. So now CHS members -- don't overlook this important matter. Write the "Billboard" at once and be sure and tell them that we want the Circus Department - and all the other interesting sub-titles that go with it; e.g. CHS Notes; Collector's Column; CFA column; Under the Marquee; etc., etc., - It's up to us!

Also at this time of the season we wish to draw to the attention of our members the fact that our next issue will be the Special Holiday Number. Those of you who remember last year's effort will recall that the Christmas issue was the first "extra large" issue that we put out, and it was due to the splendid response to our request for Christmas Greeting space and advertisements, that we were able to try for a larger issue.

Now, the time has come around again - and we would specially request that you get your copy for ads or Christmas Greetings into us as soon as possible, as we intend to have the December issue in the mail by the 10th of that month -- at the latest. We hope that a majority of our members will see fit to use the space in the Bandwagon again, and remember - it is a fitting way to remember your friend collectors with a greeting -- and in these times, very economical too! The rate is at \$3.00 per page, and pro rata. 50¢ makes a very nice item, and even for 25¢ we can give you something worthwhile. Please remit by postal or express money order - and send your copy and remittance to the Secretary.

Do not fail to read every word of the Special Election Supplement enclosed with this Historical Sheet to Members.

And be sure and return your ballot at once to Bill Green - the Election Commissioner, and thus let us get off to a good start for the New Year!

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